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## Local politicians win Web site award

### Tracy's Pombo wins Gold Mouse for page that addresses concerns of constituents

[Edward Epstein, Chronicle Washington Bureau](#)

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**Washington** -- Bay Area Web heads probably don't think of Stockton or Tracy as Internet hotbeds, but think again. The official Web site of Rep. Richard Pombo,

the Tracy rancher known for his cowboy boots and hat, was named one of Congress' best Monday.

In addition to Republican Pombo, whose site -- [www.house.gov/pombo/](http://www.house.gov/pombo/) -- won a Gold Mouse award, Bay Area members named among the tops by the Congress Online Project were Silver Mouse winners Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., and Rep. Mike Honda, D-San Jose. Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., won a Bronze Mouse.

The second annual awards, which ranked 610 sites of House and Senate members and committees, are much more than an inside event for techies. E-mail has supplanted traditional mail and phone calls as the preferred method for constituents to contact their members, especially since the 2001 anthrax scare on Capitol Hill, and congressional Web sites have become a main source of information for constituents.

"The best Web sites show that the members anticipate the needs of their constituents. They anticipate the questions in advance and answer them," said Brad Fitch, deputy director of the online project, which is a nonpartisan joint venture of the Congressional Management Foundation and George Washington University and is funded by the Pew Charitable Trust.

The member sites can be found at [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov) and [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov).

While none of the members of Congress from Silicon Valley or San Francisco -- the heartland of high-tech and the Internet -- won the Gold Mouse, California's 53 House members and two senators scored well as a group. The state's grade point average, at 3.18, was third, behind Vermont and New Mexico.

"The fact that California got so high up in the rankings shows that the entire delegation is doing a good job," Fitch said.

The study lauded the site of Pombo, who recently was named chairman of the House Resources Committee, for providing fresh information -- which is usually updated daily when the House is in session -- and for providing users with a weekly newsletter about the congressman's activities.

The site is put together by staffers at Pombo's Stockton office, said Doug Heye, the congressman's Washington press secretary. The Resources Committee site won a silver award.

"We've learned that the site has to be easy to read and that information has to be easily accessible," Heye said.

"The quality of Congress' Web sites has improved dramatically over the past year," he added, an opinion the report backed.

Fifty percent of all congressional Web sites received grades of A or B, five times more than in 2002, the study said. More of the sites now help users navigate more easily through the government's bureaucracy and provide members' voting records and texts of speeches.

But those that are bad, which the study didn't identify, are still bad. The number of sites graded with a D or an F fell only marginally from 2002, from 32 percent to 25 percent. The worst sites spend lots of space lauding the host lawmaker and don't do much for constituents.

Web excellence is bipartisan and doesn't depend on political philosophy. In the House, 70 percent of the members who won Gold, Silver or Bronze Mouse awards were Republicans, but in the Senate, 71 percent of the winners were Democrats.

*E-mail Edward Epstein at [ee Epstein@sfchronicle.com](mailto:ee Epstein@sfchronicle.com).*

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